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SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SHANGHAI POSITIVE ABOUT SECRETARY'S VISIT, CAUTIOUS ABOUT FUTURE RELATIONS

REF: SHANGHAI 41

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Secretary Clinton's visit to China in February and her comment that "we are in the same boat" left many university students in Shanghai with a positive impression, hopeful of future bilateral cooperation on the economic crisis and climate change. Students in several roundtable discussions were generally optimistic about future bilateral relations but expressed concern that sensitive issues like human rights, Tibet, Taiwan, and trade protectionism could obstruct positive cooperation on other fronts. One could also sense underlying anger at what some students view as an economic crisis created by the United States. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) Poloff held separate roundtable discussions in Shanghai with students at Fudan University, Jiaotong University, Tongji University, and Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) in February and March. The discussions involved a total of nearly 40 undergraduate, Masters, and PhD students, most majoring in international relations, public policy, political science, and finance. This is the first of two reports on discussions with university students. The second report will focus on Shanghai student perspectives on China's future and job prospects (see septel).

Secretary's Visit Leaves Positive Impression

¶13. (SBU) These university students in Shanghai told Poloff that they view Secretary's Clinton's visit to China in February a "success" because it laid the foundations for future discussion and cooperation between the two countries. The visit drew much attention in China, as the Secretary is seen as a "star" by many Chinese. One student said the Secretary appeared "powerful and sociable" during her visit. Although one MA student at Tongji University thought the timing of the visit was not ideal given the Chinese leadership's focus at the time on preparations for the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in early March, other students thought the timing was good, since it established a high level working relationship at an early stage of the new U.S. administration.

¶14. (SBU) Many students were impressed by the Secretary's use of Chinese proverbs. A PhD student from Fudan University said the Secretary's comment that "we are in the same boat" and "we are rowing in the same direction" particularly struck a positive

chord with many Chinese, giving them a sense of "common destiny and interdependence." Other students added that the Secretary's visit provided a powerful symbol of bilateral cooperation. Some students, however, said they thought the visit was more symbolic than substantive, the most substantive part being the announcement to continue a high-level strategic dialogue, which many Shanghai scholars and students view as one of the key successes of the Bush Administration's China policy (reftel). Even if there was little substance to the visit, said one MA student at Fudan, the "most important thing" for the Secretary this time was "to listen" rather than just criticize China on issues like human rights and Tibet. Many students said they were pleasantly surprised the Secretary did not publicly raise these sensitive issues with the Chinese leaders.

#### Cautious About Future Relations

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**15.** (SBU) Most of the students told Poloff they are generally optimistic about the future of U.S.-China relations. They emphasized the need for greater bilateral cooperation in combating the economic crisis and climate change, and they were happy to see these issues highlighted during the Secretary's visit. Regarding climate change in particular, the students were optimistic that President Obama would take the lead in forging a global consensus, some hoping the United States will show "signs of commitment" to this issue in the near future. At the same time, however, several students said it will take time for China to "turn green" and that the world should be patient with China.

**16.** (SBU) Uncertainties, however, remain in the bilateral relationship over sensitive issues like human rights, Tibet, and Taiwan, said several students. Some expressed their hope that

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the United States can talk to China about human rights in ways that can help China improve its situation rather than alienate it. Several students pointed to Taiwan as the central sticking point in U.S.-China relations. The cross-Strait situation will not be resolved for several decades, said one MA student at Tongji, but the United States should just let both sides continue to talk. An MA student at Jiaotong University thinks China remains suspicious of U.S. intentions regarding Taiwan and said China should "keep a close eye" on the United States (vis-`-vis Taiwan), even if overall bilateral relations improve.

**17.** (SBU) Several students expressed concern that the Democratic-controlled U.S. Congress will formulate tough trade policies on China. With the Democrats in power, increased protectionism could become a "short-term obstacle" to good relations, said a PhD student from Fudan University. Some students also expressed concern (and a certain degree of misunderstanding, which Poloff tried to clarify) over the "Buy American" provision in the U.S. fiscal stimulus package. Several students emphasized that most Chinese people want to be friends with the United States but that it is up to the United States to reciprocate through its actions on some of these sensitive issues.

#### Comment

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**18.** (SBU) The student roundtables were conducted as open, informal conversations with minimal "adult" supervision. The Jiaotong and SISU discussions were held without the presence of any professors while one Fudan professor and one Tongji professor, both already well-known to Poloff, were present at the Fudan and Tongji roundtables. The students represent a microcosm of thinking at some of these elite universities in Shanghai. Although most were positive about Secretary Clinton's visit to China and the future of U.S.-China relations, when discussion shifted to the effects of the economic crisis on their own lives and job prospects (to be reported septel), one could sense underlying anger at what some of these students view as a crisis created by the United States.

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